

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11  
AID-05 PC-01 HA-05 OES-07 IO-13 /096 W  
-----007815 280537Z /14

R 280405Z MAY 78  
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8227

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 4297

PASS AID AND PEACE CORPS

E. O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, EAID, AF, US  
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, DR.  
ANAHITA RATEBZAD

1. SUMMARY. DURING MY INITIAL COURTESY CALL ON THE MINISTER OF THE NEWLY CREATED MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, DR. ANAHITA RATEBZAD, THE SOLE WOMAN CABINET MEMBER OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT, WE DISCUSSED HERE EARLY EXPERIENCES AS AFGHANISTAN'S FIRST WOMAN STUDENT IN THE U.S., HER MINISTRY'S RESPONSIBILITIES, PLANS FOR IMPROVING THE STATUS OF WOMEN, POPULATION PROBLEMS, AND AID AND PEACE CORPS GUIDELINES AND PROGRAMS. END SUMMARY.

2. ON MAY 24, ACCOMPANIED BY THE USAID AND PEACE CORPS DIRECTORS, I PAID MY INITIAL COURTESY CALL ON THE MINISTER OF THE NEWLY CREATED MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, DR. ANAHITA RATEBZAD, THE SOLE WOMAN CABINET MEMBER OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

3. UPON ARRIVAL, WE WERE IMMEDIATELY USHERED IN TO SEE THE MINISTER. SHE WAS DRESSED IN A SIMPLE, CONSERVATIVE DARK BLUE COTTON DRESS. HER MANNER WAS FRIENDLY AND OUTGOING. DURING THE OPENING PLEASANTRIES, I REMARKED THAT SHE HAD BEEN ONE OF THE FIRST AFGHAN WOMEN TO STUDY IN THE U.S. SOME TWENTY YEARS AGO.  
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SHE CORRECTED ME SAYING IT HAD BEEN NEARER THIRTY YEARS AGO -- IN 1949 -- BUT THAT SHE BELIEVED SHE WAS INDEED THE FIRST AFGHAN WOMAN TO UNDERTAKE SERIOUS STUDIES IN THE UNITED STATES. SHE NOTED THAT AFTER A SHORT ORIENTATION AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, SHE HAD GONE TO ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN FOR INTENSIVE LANGUAGE TRAINING BEFORE ENTERING NURSES TRAINING THERE. SHE RELATED A NUMBER OF HUMOROUS EPISODES OF WHAT IT WAS LIKE THEN TO BE A

YOUNG AFGHAN GIRL IN THE UNITED STATES. SHE RECALLED HER AMERICAN EXPERIENCE FONDLY. SHE SAID THAT HER EXPERIENCES THERE HAD BEEN A GREAT INFLUENCE ON HER THINKING AND DEVELOPMENT -- NOTING ONLY THAT SHE HAD BEEN EXTREMELY YOUNG AND HAD NOT BEEN ABLE THEN TO PUT HER EXPERIENCES INTO A MEANINGFUL FRAMEWORK. SHE SAID THAT ON HER RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN, SHE HAD WORKED IN NURSING FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS. WHEN THE MEDICAL SCHOOL ACCEPTED WOMEN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE LATE FIFTIES, SHE "GRABBED THE OPPORTUNITY." AFTER GRADUATING, SHE WENT INTO PARLIAMENT. AFTER THAT, "I WENT HOME." I REMARKED THAT I UNDERSTOOD THAT HER SON WAS COMPLETING HIS UNIVERSITY STUDIES THIS YEAR IN ARIZONA, AND INVITED HIM TO VISIT US IN WASHINGTON. DR. ANAHITA CONFIRMED THIS AND SAID THAT UPON LEAVING ARIZONA, HE EXPECTED TO BE ASSIGNED TO THE AFGHAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON FOR A PERIOD OF TIME.

4. I NEXT ASKED HER WHAT WERE HER MINISTRY'S AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY -- NOTING THAT WE HAD HEARD CONFLICTING VIEWS REGARDING THE INCLUSION OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT AND THE AFGHAN FAMILY GUIDANCE ASSOCIATION UNDER HER MINISTRY. SHE SAID THAT THESE AREAS WOULD BE INCLUDED UNDER HER MINISTRY, BUT THAT SHE HAD ASKED THAT FOR THE MOMENT, THEY BE LEFT WHERE THEY WERE. "I WANT FIRST TO GET THE MINISTRY ORGANIZED AND TO CONCENTRATE ON THOSE AREAS I KNOW BEST BEFORE ACCEPTING NEW AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY," SHE SAID. SHE ALSO STATED THAT THE ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM WAS PROPOSED FOR HER MINISTRY, BUT THAT

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SHE HAD REFUSED THIS. SHE SAID THAT MOST ADULT EDUCATION WAS CARRIED OUT BY SCHOOL TEACHERS EMPLOYED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DURING THEIR FREE TIME AND SINCE THAT MINISTRY CONTROLLED THE TEACHERS, IT WAS MORE LOGICAL FOR THE PROGRAM TO BE UNDER THAT MINISTRY. SHE SAID SHE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND YOUTH PROGRAMS. THE LATTER, SHE NOTED, WOULD SHIFT TO THE PARTY WHICH WAS A MORE LOGICAL LOCATION FOR SUCH PROGRAMS. SHE SAID THAT SHE ALSO HAD RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMERGENCY RELIEF.

5. I ASKED WHAT PLAN SHE HAD TO FURTHER THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN. SHE LAUGHED AND SAID THAT ALL HER VISITORS WERE ASKING HER THIS QUESTION. SHE DISCUSSED THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN AT SOME LENGTH -- SAYING THAT THEY WERE THE "POOREST AND LOWEST" ELEMENT IN SOCIETY -- THAT THEY WERE SEEN ONLY AS A UTILITARIAN OBJECT WITHIN THE FAMILY, AS PROPERTY.

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AID-05 PC-01 HA-05 OES-07 IO-13 /096 W  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KABUL 4297

PASS AID AND PEACE CORPS

SHE RELATED AN ANECDOTE SHOWING HOW A PEASANT PLACED MUCH MORE VALUE ON HIS LIVESTOCK THAN HIS DAUGHTERS OR WIFE. SHE WAS VAGUE AS TO SPECIFIC PROGRAMS FOR AMELIORATING THIS SITUATION, CITING THE NEED FOR "PROPAGANDA" TO EDUCATE WOMEN, AND THE NEED TO CREATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES. THE AID DIRECTOR NOTED AID'S PAST EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE STATUS OF WOMEN, SUCH AS REQUIRING THE RESERVATION OF SPACES FOR GIRLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS BUILT WITH AID ASSISTANCE, BUT THAT THESE EFFORTS HAD NOT BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL. THE MINISTER AGREED THAT THE PROBLEM WAS A PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT ONE AND THAT THE WOMEN, THEMSELVES, OFTEN OPPOSED CHANGES AIMED AT IMPROVING THEIR CONDITION. SHE SAID THE EXPERIENCE OF VILLAGE WOMEN COMPLETING SIX YEARS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL HAD NOT BEEN ENCOURAGING. THE EDUCATION HAD HAD NO, OR EVEN NEGATIVE, UTILITARIAN VALUE IN TEACHING GIRLS RELEVANT SKILLS OR ATTITUDES FOR LIVING IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. (COMMENT: INTERESTINGLY, THE MINISTER CONCLUDED FROM THIS THAT THE NEED WAS FOR MAKING MORE SECONDARY SCHOOLING AVAILABLE FOR WOMEN AND PROVIDING MORE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, SUCH AS HANDICRAFTS; RATHER THAN TRYING TO MAKE PRIMARY SCHOOL MORE RELEVANT. END COMMENT).

6. NOTING THE SERIOUS POPULATION PROBLEM THAT WOULD CERTAINLY FACE AFGHANISTAN IN THE COMING YEARS, I ASKED THE MINISTER  
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HOW SHE VIEWED THE PROBLEM AND WHAT SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT IT. SHE SAID THAT THE IMMEDIATE AND PRIORITY NEED WAS TO TRAIN AND PROVIDE JOBS FOR THIS GENERATION -- BUT THAT POPULATION GROWTH WAS A PROBLEM, AND THAT AT SOME TIME A "LID WOULD HAVE TO BE PUT

ON IT." (COMMENT: IT WAS APPARENT THAT THE MINISTER HAD THUS FAR NOT CONSIDERED THIS A PRIORITY ISSUE TO BE ADDRESSED BY HER MINISTRY, NOR REALLY THOUGHT MUCH OF THE ISSUE ITSELF. END COMMENT)

7. THE AID AND PEACE CORPS DIRECTORS BRIEFLY DESCRIBED THEIR PROGRAMS IN AFGHANISTAN, AND THEIR POLICY GUIDELINES -- TO HELP THE RURAL POOR AND MEET BASIC HUMAN NEEDS. THE AID DIRECTOR DISCUSSED AT SOME LENGTH THE AID EXPERIENCE IN THE HEALTH SECTOR AND THE ENCOURAGING WORK WHICH HAD BEEN UNDERTAKEN IN TRYING TO EXTEND BASIC HEALTH CARE TO WOMEN AND TO RURAL VILLAGERS. SHE WARMED TO THE SUBJECT AND ENTHUSIASTICALLY AGREED THAT THE GREATEST NEED FOR IMPROVED HEALTH CARE WAS IN THE VILLAGES, NOT THE URBAN HOSPITALS. SHE NOTED SEVERAL TIMES IN THIS CONTEXT THAT FOREIGN AID HAD ALL TOO OFTEN BEEN INEFFECTIVELY "CONSUMED BY US" AFGHANS.

8. AFTER APPROXIMATELY 45 MINUTES OF DISCUSSION, WE TOOK OUR LEAVE FROM THE MINISTER. IN PARTING, THE MINISTER EMPHASIZED HOW MUCH SHE LIKED AMERICA, AND LOOKED FORWARD TO WORKING WITH US IN THE FUTURE.

9. COMMENT: THE MINISTER THROUGHOUT OUR MEETING WAS WARM AND FRIENDLY. SHE RESPONDED TO OUR QUESTIONS THOUGHTFULLY AND EARNESTLY, BUT WITH A GOOD SENSE OF HUMOR. THERE WAS LITTLE LEFTIST JARGON APART FROM FREQUENT USE OF THE WORD "MASSES" AND THE NEED FOR "PROPAGANDA." SHE WAS GENERALLY VAGUE WITH REGARD TO PLANS FOR DEALING WITH SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, CITING THE NEED FOR TRAINING AND THE CREATION OF ADDITIONAL EMPLOYMENT  
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OPPORTUNITIES, OFTEN SUGGESTING AN URBAN BIAS IN HER THINKING -- FURTHER INDICATION THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAS YET TO GET ITS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY TOGETHER. NEVERTHELESS, DESPITE SOME APPEARANCE OF BEING OVERWORKED, THE MINISTER APPEARED CONFIDENT IN HER ABILITY TO GET ON WITH THE JOB. END COMMENT.  
ELIOT

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## Message Attributes

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